

SIXTH AND NINTH COMMANDMENTS

SEXUAL MORALITY

(C 2331-2400, 2514-2533, USC Chaps. 30 & 33)

Note to small groups: This article is eight pages long and is divided into three parts. It may take you two sessions to cover all the material.

Online course-takers: This article has five sets of questions spread throughout. Respond to each set.

The sixth commandment (C 2331-2400, USC Ch 30)
“You shall not commit adultery.”

The ninth commandment (C 2514-2533, USC Ch 33)
“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.”

This article is divided into three parts:

- Part One: Introduction to human sexuality
- Part Two: Chastity
- Part Three: Family planning

PART ONE: Introduction to human sexuality

The sixth and ninth commandments deal with the gift of our sexuality and how we are to use it in accordance with God’s plan.

The *Catechism* states: “*Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul. It especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others* (C 2332).

From the above statement, we can say that our sexuality touches every aspect of our being—physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual. Our sexuality is the energy in us that makes us attractive and attracts us to other men and women. Sexually alive people are people who are in touch with their bodies, with their feelings, are able to relate to other men and women in healthy ways, and have a yearning to connect with the transcendent or spiritual dimension of life.

Three characteristics of human sexuality

The gender dimension. “Male and female he created them,” so writes the author of the Book of Genesis. The gender dimension of our sexuality has to do with our “maleness” and “femaleness” as persons and how men and women interact with each other and approach life.

Experiencing and enjoying male and female relationships and friendships are key ways for us to become the person that God created us to be. In the book of Genesis, God tells us that “it is not good for us to be alone.” This does not mean that all of us should be married. After all, Jesus was not married, but he did experience and enjoy both male and female relationships.

The challenge for men and women (in the family, in Church and in the work place) is to see each other as *partners* and *companions* in the journey of life. When God created men and women, he did not create one gender to dominate the other. Rather, God created men and women to complement each other. To the extent that men and women succeed in being partners and companions in the journey of life, they will reflect to the world a true image of God.

The affective dimension. This dimension of our sexuality refers to our capacity as human persons to be loving, compassionate, vulnerable, trusting and responsive in our interpersonal relationships with persons of the same and opposite sex. To the extent that the affective dimension of our sexuality is developed, we have the capacity for emotionally intimate relationships.

The genital dimension. This refers to the capacity of men and women to have genital or sexual intercourse. True genital expression can have a physical, pleasurable, relational, procreative and spiritual dimension to it. The “playboy culture” recognizes or emphasizes only the physical and fun dimension of sex.

Having looked at the above three characteristics of human sexuality, we can say that persons committed to a life of celibacy can enjoy a lot of intimacy in their lives if they have developed their capacity for close and loving relationships. On the other hand, others may experience a lot of genital intimacy but very little emotional intimacy because they have failed to develop the affective dimension of their sexuality.

The impact of positive and negative experiences in our sexual formation

If we were raised in an environment in which we received positive and wholesome messages regard-

ing our sexuality, our bodies, and male and female relationships, we were indeed very blessed. We were also blessed if during our teenage years, sexuality issues were openly discussed and talked about, and if we had mature adults in our lives to help us to negotiate the challenges of growing through our adolescent years.

On the other hand, if we grew up in an environment in which there was a “great silence” around sexuality issues, or an environment in which sex was always spoken about with overtones of warning and danger, or if we were told by parents or church teachers that all sexual feelings were wrong and sinful, we would, most likely, have picked up lots of negative messages about sex and sexuality. Worse still, if the key relationships in our childhood formation were dysfunctional or abusive, we were, most likely, deeply wounded in this important area of our lives.

Such woundedness would have made it very difficult for us to feel positive about our bodies and sexuality. It would also have wounded our capacity to enter into healthy relationships with other men and women. Furthermore, if we were raised in a home or church environment in which we were told that all sexual thoughts and feelings were sinful and that the *worst* sins were the sins against the sixth and ninth commandments, our capacity to relate to a loving God would also have been negatively impacted. As a result of negative experiences and messages in childhood, many of us may have grown into adulthood with a certain amount of confusion, guilt, shame and awkwardness in the area of our sexuality.

Reflection questions

1. How would you rate the formation you received at home and at church on sexuality issues? How could it have been more helpful?
2. When it comes to relationships, what are some things men can learn from women, and vice versa?
Women: What is one thing you would want men to remember when relating to women?
Men: What is one thing you would want women to remember when relating to men?
3. What are two qualities that help us to have healthy relationships with both men and women?

PART TWO: Chastity

The *Catechism* defines chastity as “*the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual*

being” (C 2337). The virtue of chastity helps us to integrate our sexuality with our whole being—body, mind and spirit. It helps us to celebrate and appreciate our God-given gift of sexuality and to relate to other men and women in a caring and respectful way, and helps us to avoid all forms of manipulative and exploitative relationships.

Developing a pure heart (C 2517-2527, USC p. 441)

The *Catechism*’s teaching on the ninth commandment looks at how we can develop a heart that will help us to be chaste and pure in our relationships with others and self. The sixth beatitude says: “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” (Mt. 5:8). According to the *Catechism*, the “pure in heart” are those who have attuned their intellects and wills to the demands of God’s holiness in three areas: charity, chastity and the love of truth and orthodoxy of faith (C 2518).

The heart is the scriptural term for the very center of the soul, as the physical heart is the center and lifeblood of the body. “The heart is the seat of moral personality” (C 2517). Out of the heart flows evil thoughts such as murder, adultery and fornication, as well as noble thoughts such as charity, mercy, justice and purity (Mt 15:9).

Obstacles and helpful ways to living a chaste life

Dr. William Kraft, Ph.D., who has degrees in Spirituality and Psychology, outlines in his book *Whole and Holy Sexuality*, healthy and unhealthy ways to deal with sexual thoughts and feelings. Three of the unhealthy ways mentioned by Kraft are:

Repression. Through this negative defense mechanism, a person seeks to deny and/or repress sexual thoughts and feelings.

Insulation and isolation. Some people cope with sexual feelings and the fear of genital involvement by withdrawing into themselves, by becoming very detached and emotionally uninvolved, and by living “from the neck up.”

Acting out. The other extreme to repression, insulation and isolation is a promiscuous lifestyle whereby people become involved periodically or regularly in “one-night stands,” short-term relationships, compulsive masturbation and pornography. Individuals who constantly repress all genital feelings and desires may sometimes go on an acting-out spree of the sexual behaviors mentioned above. Dr. Kraft notes that many of us learn only two ways

of dealing with sexual feelings and desires, namely, repression and gratification.

Healthy ways to integrate sexual thoughts and feelings into our lives

Suppression. We acknowledge sexual thoughts and feelings, but we decide not to pay attention to them or act on them. Whereas repression is a denial of our sexuality, suppression involves acknowledgment and control of our sexuality.

Sublimation is a decision to rechannel or invest our energy into an activity that is in harmony with our values. This could mean some physical activity like exercise or gardening or some intellectual activity such as reading.

Anticipation can help us maintain a healthy sexuality. For instance, a woman knows that at certain times during her monthly cycle she may feel lonely or in need of more affection, affirmation and understanding. She can anticipate these vulnerable times by planning activities or strategies that will be helpful. It is not unlike the person dealing with the loss of a loved one. She or he knows that birthdays, anniversaries and certain seasons are going to be especially challenging. One good way to cope with difficult and challenging times is by planning in advance some things that will be helpful.

Friends. Having one or more friends with whom we can openly and honestly share our struggles in this or other areas of our lives is surely one of life's great blessings. Being genuinely listened to invariably increases our sense of well-being, decreases stress, and helps us to feel more free and hopeful.

Discipline. Every good athlete knows the importance of discipline in sports. Likewise, anyone who has tried to lose weight or give up smoking knows the importance of discipline. In a similar way, anyone who seeks to develop the virtue of chastity will need to be disciplined. Good discipline enables us to say "no" to what impedes our growth and to say "yes" to what helps us become a fully alive spiritual and sexual person.

Humor. Life can become so serious and rigid that we lose our capacity to enjoy the journey. William Kraft writes: "Humor brings life into perspective. Zest and hilarity affirm our true place in life. Humor is the springboard to the divine. Moreover, humor heals: it activates processes that promote health" (ibid p. 97).

Counseling. If we are deeply wounded in our sexuality, we will most likely need a good and

understanding counselor to help us deal with past painful experiences and integrate them into our lives.

Prayer. Being able to pray openly and honestly with God about sexuality issues is a wonderful blessing. Unfortunately, many people wounded in this area are also wounded in their relationship with God, which makes it hard for them to see God as the One who can bring healing to this area of their lives. If this is our situation, we will need the help of a good spiritual director. For Catholics, regular use of the sacrament of Reconciliation can also be helpful.

The more we develop the discipline of keeping our eyes on Jesus, the more purified our hearts will be, and gradually will we be able to look at and relate to others and ourselves in a respectful and loving way. Growing in chastity and purity of heart is a lifelong task.

As we journey, we need to learn the fine art of balancing *gentleness* with *firmness*. We need to be gentle with ourselves when we fall or go astray. On the other hand, we need to be firm with ourselves realizing that growth does not happen without tough choices, self-denial and daily struggling to stay on the straight and narrow.

Reflection questions

1. The above section mentions eight ways that can help us to live chaste lives. Which of them speak to you most? Which ones are most absent in today's culture?
2. What is one message you would like to offer young people struggling to become healthy sexual human beings?
3. What messages would you want young people to hear today about chastity?

Sins against chastity (C 2351, USC p. 406)

Even though we live in a sex-saturated society, hardly anyone spends time *thinking* about the *meaning* and *purpose* of sex. How often do we ask: What did *God* have in mind when he implanted a sexual faculty in the human person?

Catholic Tradition would respond that God had a twofold purpose, namely, the continuation of the human race (often called the *procreative dimension* of sex) and the strengthening of the love bond between the man and the woman, the husband and the wife, so that they could raise their child/children in a loving environment (the *unitive dimension*). We might add that in the language of love, genital sex is

a way for two people to say: “I give myself totally to you. I am totally committed to our relationship and if God blesses us with a child, I will be here to love and raise that child with you.” The Church believes that the best context for that kind of relationship is marriage.

As much as they might like to do so, no couple can rewrite the meaning of sexual intercourse. It is tied to *committed love* and to a love that creates new *life*. To let on that sexual intercourse is something else is to separate it from the design of our Creator. When our Church speaks about “openness to new life,” it is, of course, only speaking about couples for whom this is a biological possibility. Now that we are clear about the Creator’s design for sex, we can look at some of the ways that people can fail to live out God’s purpose.

Recreational or casual sex. Recreational or casual sex often occurs between people who want the *pleasure* that comes with genital sex but don’t want the *responsibility* of an intimate relationship which of its very nature demands much self-giving and sacrifice. In her book *The Thrill of the Chaste*, Dawn Eden (who spent many years involved in recreational sex) writes: “If you hunger for intimacy but fear rejection, it is much easier to let a man touch your body than to let him touch your heart” (p. 83). Recreational or casual sex is morally wrong not only because it trivializes a gift of God but also because it completely separates sex from its proper context, namely, that of love and marriage, and uses the other person as a means of sexual gratification. The fun and pleasure dimension of recreational sex ends quickly when a pregnancy occurs or when sexual disease is contracted.

Dating couples. Many dating couples engage in premarital sex as a way to express their love and to see if they are sexually compatible. Others move in together because they believe it is a smart way to prepare for marriage. What can be said about these two modern day aspects of dating?

It is normal for dating couples who are growing in their love for each other, to want to express their love in a physical way. But when dating couples become sexually active with each other, they are usually allowing their bodies to say much more than their hearts are ready to give.

For a Christian couple, the dating period is a time to discern if God is calling them to the sacred vocation of marriage. It is a time to see if a particular person

would make a lifelong partner. It is a time to see what qualities, gifts, values and goals a person would bring to the marriage table. It is a time to see how mature and good-hearted that person is, how he/she handles pressure and difficult situations, how well he/she communicates and deals with conflict.

However wonderful sex might be during this period of the relationship, it might also get in the way of two people making a good decision about their readiness for marriage. One woman who had lived with her fiancé during the dating period decided to move out. She said: “I had come to the point that my judgment of the relationship was based on sex. When sex was on and good, I judged the relationship to be good and vice versa. So I moved out and stopped having sex to see how the relationship would be without the sex.” Often the sexual dimension of a dating relationship makes it very difficult for a couple to break up even though there are very good reasons for doing so.

Cohabitation. As stated above many couples today think that cohabitation is a good way to prepare for marriage. But all the research is showing that couples who cohabit prior to marriage have a much higher rate of divorce than couples who choose to go the traditional route. Perhaps the old saying is correct; “Easy to move in, easy to move out.” In addition, cohabitation can be a source of scandal to younger siblings and friends. It also weakens the respect that we, as a Christian community, should have for the sacred institution of marriage.

The gospel ideal of saving sex for marriage is not an easy one and will make little or no sense to couples who do not have a personal relationship with Christ and are not serious about following his gospel message in this area.

Living the Church’s message of “saving sex for marriage” is very contrary to the world message of “safe sex.” But as we ponder the results of the world’s way: AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, increase in abortions, unwed pregnancies and divorce, we may begin to see the wisdom of the Church’s message in this area of Christian life.

Reflection questions

1. Cohabitation is regarded by most young people today as a good way to prepare for marriage. What do you think?

2. How do you think parents should respond when their young adult tells them that he/she has moved in with his/her girlfriend/boyfriend?

Extramarital sex. Extramarital sex, or sex outside of marriage, is wrong because it is a violation of the marriage covenant. It is a grave sin against the sixth commandment which says: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Within marriage, couples can also be unchaste without becoming involved with a third person. They could have loveless sex or use sex as a weapon to either punish or get what they want. William Kraft writes: “Chaste people, married or unmarried, are respectful and loving people. They abstain from exploitative, manipulative, and deceptive behavior. They do not regard sexuality as something to use or as simply a source of pleasure. Rather, they see and celebrate in chastity the mystery—the spirit—of sex” (ibid p. 58).

Lust. The *Catechism* states that “lust is disordered desire for...sexual pleasure” (C 2351). In his book *Catholic Christianity*, Peter Kreeft writes: “Lust does not mean sexual pleasure as such, nor the delight in it, nor the desire for it in its right context. Contrary to what the world thinks, the Church teaches that sexual pleasure is good, not evil. For God created sex and its pleasure... No spontaneous thoughts and feelings can be sins until they are willed or consented to by the will. Thoughts and feelings of sexual arousal are not lust: “lust is *willing* the thoughts and feelings just for the pleasure, without the purposes of the marriage union” (pp. 246-247).

Masturbation (C 2352). Masturbation involves the intentional stimulation of the genital organs for purposes of solitary pleasure. Concerning this activity, William Kraft writes: “Masturbation is particularly seductive because it is an easy and accessible way to reduce tension and to explore genital feelings and fantasies without interpersonal vulnerability, responsibility, and accountability. It seems we have a license to masturbate almost whenever we feel like it. We need not worry about other people or social consequences; it can be kept to oneself” (ibid p. 104).

The Church teaches that masturbation is morally wrong because God intended sexual activity to be relational and within the context of marriage. Furthermore, masturbation separates sex from its unitive and procreative dimensions. But the *Catechism* also wisely teaches certain factors can lessen or even erase one’s guilt or moral blameworthiness in

the case of masturbation. These include immaturity, anxiety, force of an acquired habit, and other social or psychological factors like compulsion (C 2352).

Pornography. The *Catechism* states that “pornography consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties” (C 2354). Today, pornography which is now more accessible through the internet, also includes the “sexploitation” of children. It is a multi-billion dollar industry in which huge numbers of adults, especially men, as well as teenagers, are addicted to it.

Writing on this issue in their Pastoral Letter *Love is for Life*, the Irish bishops state: “Never in pornographic material, and all too rarely in modern advertising, are women represented as persons to whom men might look for intelligent conversation or interesting ideas or equal companionship. For the pornographer, and all too often for the advertiser, women are assumed to be of interest to males only as desirable sexual bodies, to be seized and possessed for male sexual pleasure. Pornography is morally wrong because it places sex in a context of lovelessness, of exploitation, of taking without giving, of pleasure without commitment” (p. 35).

Homosexuality (C 2357-2359, USC p. 407). Homosexuality is the term used to refer to men and women who have an exclusive, enduring and predominant sexual attraction towards persons of the same sex.

In its three paragraphs on homosexuality, the *Catechism* makes five points:

- The genesis of same-sex attraction remains largely unexplained.
- Persons with same-sex attraction do not choose their condition or sexual orientation.
- Persons with same-sex attraction must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Any form of unjust discrimination towards persons with same-sex attraction is morally wrong and should be condemned.
- Sexual relations between homosexual persons is morally wrong. Why? Catholic newspaper columnist and author, Amy Wellborn, writes: “To put it rather bluntly, the parts (i.e., our genital parts) were made to fit and fit for a purpose...namely, the creation of a family in the physical and spiritual sense. The purpose of genital sex is to create communion between a man and a woman (more specifically between a

husband and a wife) and to procreate new life. Homosexual acts can never fulfill the twofold design of the Creator for genital sex.” In stating that homosexual acts are morally wrong, we are not saying that homosexual desires are morally wrong, unless of course, we deliberately will them.

- “Homosexual persons are called to chastity” (C 2359). Just as single persons with a heterosexual orientation are called to live a chaste life, so are persons with a homosexual orientation. Of course, a major difference is that marriage is always an option for the single person with a heterosexual orientation. Persons with same-sex attraction can and should cultivate warm, loving and caring friendships with persons of the same and opposite sex. Such friendships are usually tremendously life giving.

(*Courage* is a Catholic organization that ministers to persons with same-sex attraction.)

Reflection questions

1. Pornography is a multi-billion dollar industry, causing many teens and adults, especially men, to become sex addicts. What should or can be done about this issue?
2. Should same-sex couples be allowed to marry and adopt children?

PART THREE: FAMILY PLANNING (C 2366-2372, USC p. 409)

Co-creating a child with God is surely one of the great joys of married life. On the other hand, working with God to determine the number of children a couple should have can be a big challenge. Regarding this issue, three points can be made.

- The Church encourages couples to engage in family planning or responsible parenthood. In considering how many children to have and when to have them, a husband and wife, according to a Vatican II document, “will thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already and those who may be foreseen” (*Gaudium et Spes* 50). Some couples may decide to have many children. Other couples may decide on a smaller number of children for reasons of health, temperament, energy or finances. Either way, the Church encourages parents to be prayerful and responsible when it comes to this decision.
- The Church teaches that parents should only engage in *natural forms* of birth control. Hence, all unnatural or artificial forms of birth control are contrary to the natural law and not morally permissible. These include the use of condoms, diaphragms, the pill, and sterilization.

The Church sees the use of unnatural forms of birth control as separating the procreative dimension of sexual intercourse from its unitive dimension (the aspect that nourishes the love of husband and wife). The Church believes that when couples are using natural methods of family planning (e.g., the *Billings Natural Family Method*), they are using the means God and nature has given them.

- On hearing the Church say that contraception is wrong because it interferes with nature, some people ask: “What is the difference between using eyeglasses or corrective surgery and contraception? All three interfere with nature.” To this objection, the Church responds: “This line of reasoning is false because the intervention of a lens or a medical surgeon is intended to *restore* a sick body or organ to what nature intended it to be, whereas, the use of contraception is intended to *prevent* a healthy body from operating as it was intended to by God.”

While the Church’s teaching on this issue may seem totally out of date, it is worth considering the following:

- All Christian denominations embraced the Church’s traditional teaching until 1930.
- Some Christians, including those who are non-churchgoing, are drawn to *Natural Family Planning* because it is more in tune with nature and because they want to avoid the negative consequences of using artificial methods of family planning.
- There is a very low rate of divorce (about 3%) amongst couples who practice natural family planning methods of birth control. Many couples have found that natural family planning strengthens their relationship. Of course, it should also be stated that other equally dedicated Catholic couples have experienced natural family planning as hurtful to their relationship. This is especially true when one spouse is resistant to using natural family planning methods of birth control.

Sadly, all too many Catholics have seriously disregarded the Church’s teaching on this issue. All too many have explored the Billings Natural Family Planning method of birth control. For more information on this issue, contact their website at www.billingsnaturalfamilyplanning.org.

Negative consequences of a contraceptive mentality

When Pope Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae* (*On Human Life*) in 1968, he warned of “grave consequences” that would follow if the use of contraceptives became widespread. Now forty+ years later,

we can look back and see if the Pope may have had an eye into the future.

Hardly anyone would deny that there has been a widespread decline in sexual morality in the past forty years. All we have to do is look at the increase in the number of divorces, abortions, out-of-wedlock pregnancies and sexually related diseases.

Of course, it would be wrong to say that contraception is the only cause of this decline, but it would also be a grave error to think that the widespread use of contraception has nothing to do with the decline in sexual morality. The easy availability of contraceptives has led teenagers and adults to believe that they can engage in non-marital sex “responsibly.” Popular “wisdom” supposes that the easy availability of contraceptives would protect teenagers and young adults from becoming pregnant which, in turn, would decrease the number of abortions. The fact is that easy access to contraceptives has done the very opposite. As the number and proportion of teenage family planning clinics increase, so do the number of teenage pregnancies and abortions.

Writing on the connection between the widespread use of contraceptives, abortion and non-marital sex, Janet Smith, Professor of Ethics at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, states: “Most abortions are the result of unwanted pregnancies; most unwanted pregnancies are the result of sexual relationships outside marriage; and most sexual relationships outside of marriage are facilitated by the availability of contraception. To turn the “progression” around: contraception leads to an increase in non-marital sex; an increase in non-marital sex leads to more unwanted pregnancies; more unwanted pregnancies lead to more abortions. Not many women *intend* to use abortion as a “back-up” to failed contraception, but it is often undeniably used for just that purpose” (*The Catholic World Report*, July 1993).

Reflection questions

1. Why do so few couples today embrace the Church’s teaching on natural family planning?
2. Should parishes be doing more to promote natural family planning?

In vitro birth methods (C 2375-2379, USC p. 409)

Some couples have physical problems that prevent normal conception or childbirth, and yet they deeply desire to have a child together. The question arises:

does the desire for children have any limits? Do parents have a right to have a child in any way possible? This question has become very real since biomedical research has discovered new ways of conceiving outside the womb. This fast-changing technology bypasses the normal conception process by taking a woman’s egg and a man’s sperm and joining them together in a laboratory dish. Sometimes the egg and sperm belong to a married couple, sometimes they do not. Sometimes we may have a donor womb person or surrogate mother involved in trying to bring about a new life. What does the Church have to say about all this?

- The Church is very sympathetic towards couples who are trying to conceive a child and are unable to do so. For their sake, it is very important that biomedical research continue to find ways to reduce human infertility and to discover new ways to treat couples who are unable to conceive a child. Such research is encouraged by the Church. After all, the father of genetics, George Mendel, was a Catholic priest.
- The Church reminds us that every human life is a *gift* from God. A gift cannot be demanded. While there is a right to life once conceived, there is no prior “right to be conceived.” Because it is possible to do something does not make it necessarily right to do.
- Addressing the use of reproductive technology to help couples to have a child, Thomas Wenski, Bishop of Orlando, writes: “Science, if it is to truly serve humanity, cannot separate itself from the demands of ethics: the ends do not justify the means. The process of In Vitro fertilization very frequently involves the deliberate destruction of embryos – some 80 percent of embryos produced artificially are sacrificed in efforts to secure successful implantation. Each embryo, however, is an individual human being and not just simply a mass of cells to be used, selected or discarded. Pope John Paul II observed: “The various techniques of artificial reproduction, which would seem to be at the service of life and which are frequently used with this intention, actually open the door to new threats against life” (*“Evangelium Vitae,”* 14; Florida Catholic, March 13-26, 2009).
- A 2008 Vatican Instruction called *Dignitas Personae* (Dignity of the Person) states: “The desire to have a child cannot justify the “production” of offspring; just as the desire not to have a child cannot justify the abandonment or destruction of a

child once he or she has been conceived” (16). Again, we recall that just because something can be done does not mean that it should be done. “The origin of human life has its authentic context in marriage and in the family, where it is generated through an act which expresses the reciprocal love between a man and a woman...” (DP).

- What about homologous artificial insemination and fertilization (where the sperm and ovum of a husband and wife are combined outside the womb)? While the Church finds this procedure to be less objectionable than the situation which involves a third party, it still finds it to be morally unacceptable because the procreative dimension is separated from intercourse. In other words, the existence of the child is entrusted to science; it is not the result of the gift of husband and wife to each other.

Concluding remarks

This article places before the reader the Church’s teaching on many issues that our society rejects and that many good Christians struggle with: premarital sex, cohabitation, same-sex unions, artificial contraception and *in vitro* fertilization.

As we struggle with some of these issues, it may be helpful to remember that many of Jesus’ teachings are also hard to embrace, e.g., forgiving life’s hurts not just seven times but seventy times seven times, dealing with the cross whereby bad things happen to good people, or trying to live a simple life in a materialistic society. The truth is that the Gospel of Jesus is no easy street religion. Rather, it is a call to radical discipleship, a call that demands much generosity of us and a call that demands tremendous cooperation with God’s grace.

Will we always respond perfectly to all of the above issues? Of course not, and our Church realizes that very well. That is the reason we have confessionals in every church. There we can humbly confess our failures and weaknesses, and receive the grace to start all over again. When it comes to the radical call of Jesus’ message, we can be sure that the devil wants to discourage us or even cause us to quit trying. But God is with us every step of the way. He is there to show us his mercy every time we fall down. He is with us to encourage us to keep trying when we feel weak and discouraged, and when we fall down. As we struggle with any of the issues in this article, we might consider speaking with an

understanding priest who can accompany us in our struggles and pray with us as well.

Discussion question

1. How do you feel about couples using *in vitro* methods to conceive a child?

Meditation

We are both sexual and spiritual creatures; one without the other makes us less than God intends us to be. God calls us to use our minds and wills to maintain and nourish our sexual selves in congruence with authentic spiritual values. How we do this will be highly dependent on our vocational lifestyle—married, single, or vowed celibate—as well as individual and environmental factors. Whatever our situation, we are foolish to pursue less than holistic sexual lives.

The saving grace in this adventure is that we are in it together. We are not isolated individuals alone in our efforts; rather, we are integral members of the same community of humankind. The more you and I grow in a healthy sexuality, the more we will positively impact and help each other.

It is eminently wise to acknowledge a Power that is greater than and yet intimately related to us—a God who will help us on the journey. To deny God, however we understand God, is to reject a power that is the source of and means to healthy and holy sexual/spiritual living. To turn over our minds and wills to the care of God is a wise, practical decision. It will give us the vision and strength to become whole and holy mavericks who celebrate and live the unity of sex-and-spirit.

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